

Ideology Critique: The 'Chicago School' as a case study.

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Critical social research involves engaging prevailing ideological forms. Much has been written about ideology, and its role in the production of knowledge and reproduction of productive practices (Abercrombie, *et al.*, 1980; Althusser, 1969; Bell, 1962; CCCS, 1978; Dittberner, 1980; Hirst, 1977; Larrain, 1979, 1982; Lichteim 1967; Mannheim, 1936; Sayer, 1980;). Little, however, has been written about how critical researchers are to engage ideology.

This paper attempts, through reference to a case study, to assess the way in which ideology can be engaged. The 'Chicago School of Sociology', is used as an example of the production of knowledge about the emergence, the nature, and the institutionalisation of a discipline.

In writing this paper it became increasingly clear that, from a materialist point of view, all knowledge is ideological. There are not two realms of knowledge, one true and/or scientific and the other ideological. All knowledge is produced and legitimated in social settings and is related to the ideological superstructure in the same way as are all productive processes. The critique of ideology, then, is not simply a process of revealing 'untruths'. Empirical knowledge is based on observation (of some sort) but is also given meaning through its theoretical context. Similarly, knowledge is not a series of discrete statements, either ideological or scientific. Rather knowledge is constituted as a totality, a dynamic structural whole, in which elements are relationally linked. Knowledge is intrinsically ideological; knowledge/science and ideology are not identifiable and separable. To adopt Stuart Hall's (1985) analogy, ideology is the frame through which we view the world. We can see through the frame at different angles. We may be able to argue that different 'angles of vision' represent different 'ideologies' but this does not help us disengage ideology from knowledge. Knowledge about the world cannot be differentiated from ideology without also revealing the very nature of the frameworks we adopt in viewing the world.

What, then, are the consequences for the critical social researcher of this view of ideologically imbued knowledge? The critical social researcher is concerned with revealing the underlying nature of social processes. This does not necessarily imply the search for 'deep structures' but it does involve digging beneath the surface of appearances. The problem is, does the process of 'getting beneath the surface', in itself, reveal the nature of ideology? In other words, does ideology simply reside in surface appearances? If it does, then techniques like semiological analysis, dialectical deconstruction, and the revealing of myths will provide at least the skeletal outlines of the ideological superstructure. If it does not, then these techniques will merely provide clues as to the nature of ideology. A nature that will not become apparent until the totality is itself critically addressed.

Ideology, it is argued here, does not reside in surface appearances and cannot be 'skimmed off' simply through an engagement with phenomenal categories. Ideology is an integral part of the totality of knowledge. Semiotic analysis of connoted messages in sign systems is neither possible without a grasp of the structural relations nor, in itself, does it do more than identify 'myths'. Barthes (1974) can only hint at the link between myths and ideology because the former are merely clues to the latter. Myths are not ideology.

Marx's analysis of capital (Marx and Engels, 1887), in which he deconstructed market relations via the concept of commodity form was sufficient to provide the basis for assertions about the fetishisation of commodities, but this does not, of itself, do more than provide a clue to the ideological nature of capitalist productive relations. It is only when the commodity form is addressed in the context of the social totality, when productive relations are re-constituted as a function of the commodity form rather than obscured by money relations (as in positive economics) that capitalist ideology is laid bare. If Marx's analysis of capitalism is our model, then the critique of ideology seems a daunting task. What then, should the critical social researcher do? The first step is to realise that ideology critique is not the primary aim of critical social research. That given the view of knowledge suggested above, setting out to reveal ideology *per se* is a fruitless task. Fundamentally, ideology critique is an ongoing process and graspable only as part of other directed critical endeavours.

Critical social research, in attempting to go beyond surface appearances, engages taken-for-granted constructs; whether they are grand theoretical orientations, particular theories, 'common-sense' notions, concepts-in-use, or generally accepted empirical data. The critical social researcher works at the level of the material world, that is, with material reality constituted as empirical data, and located with a theoretical structure of knowledge, socially constituted. In radically transforming abstract conceptualisations, the critical social reformer engages the prevailing structure of knowledge at several levels. Distortions, misconceptions and myths become apparent. Disjunctions arise between social processes and accounts of social processes. Legitimizing rhetoric is gradually uncovered.

The revealing of myths provides the clues for the development of an alternative, critical, analysis. It is through the analysis that ideology is engaged. The critical social researcher, however, should avoid simply identifying different interpretations of elements of a complex totality and re-labelling them myths unless they can be structured into a coherent pattern. Such structuring involves a dialectical analysis. Myths, it must be remembered, are not isolated theoretical propositions inhabiting a realm of ideas but are rooted in social practice.

I use the term 'myth' here as a composite term to include misconceptions and distortions. By myth, I do not, of course, intend the anthropological meaning but rather that suggested by Barthes (1974). Myths are taken-for-granted conceptualisations, statements, and so on, that are structured as both 'academic' and 'common-sense' knowledge and that serve to blank off alternative conceptualisations. Arguably, they are particular manifestations of ideology and serve to reveal ideological structures. An analogy might be that developed for science by Lakatos (1970) in which a scientific research programme has a hard core surrounded by a protective belt. The hard core is inviolable and developments in the programme are aimed at the protective belt. Similarly, ideology is inviolable and myths act as a protective belt that may be engaged. For Lakatos, a scientific research programme degenerates when the positive heuristic of the programme fails to generate new ideas and the programme fights a rearguard action to maintain its hard core in the light of external discoveries. The programme is eventually abandoned. Ideology critique involves breaking through the protective belt and engaging the hard core (rather than abandoning it). It is this problem of engagement with the core that the remainder of this paper addresses.

At this stage, it is perhaps useful to draw on the case study. The substantive research undertaken by the author was on the role of the 'Chicago School' in developing a methodology for sociology (Harvey, 1985). The aim was to enquire into the sociological work of a group of individuals and to assess the

extent to which such work was integral to the development of particular methodological practices. There was no attempt at a general critique of ideology. Indeed, what ideology? The ideology of the 'Chicago School'? The ideology of American sociology? The ideology of science? The ideology of the United States in the first half of the twentieth century? No, the enquiry was directed at the practitioners and their work. By focussing on this and on the way in which their work had been represented, several inconsistencies soon became clear.

Delving into inconsistencies, rather than shelving them, is essential for critical enquiry. In the case study, the inconsistencies revealed myths at various levels [1]. The-taken-for-granted dichotomisation of sociological research practices in the United States in the first half (at least) of the twentieth century was undermined by the eclecticism of the Chicagoans. Normally associated with qualitative research, an empirical investigation of their work, their frames of reference, and their methodological and philosophical discussions revealed that they were not antagonistic towards quantification and the associated 'scientizing' of sociology. On a more specific level, the Chicagoans are usually identified with the use of participant observation. This turned out to be another myth. Like all myths it is not entirely 'untrue', but misrepresented their work. Up to the 1940s, participant observation, as currently understood, was rare. In general, a much more eclectic approach to sociological enquiry was adopted.

On another dimension altogether, however, these two examples pointed to further constructions of more complex mythical interrelationships [2]. In the first case, the construction of a heritage of two competing methodological traditions has been variously represented as the competition between nominalism and realism; positivism and phenomenology; ethnography and quantification; multivariate analysis and participant observation, amongst others. Chicago, having become associated with one side of this dichotomy, is forced into these historically reconstructed categories. What the Chicagoans offered, however, was something that bridged all these divisions. In the second case, the association of participant observation with the early (and most productive era of) Chicago sociology served four purposes. First, it acted as a legitimation of a heritage of participant observation. Second, it was indicative of the 'soft' nature of sociological enquiry at Chicago (which also became linked to the supposed meliorist and reform concerns of the Chicagoans). Third, it acted as a reaffirmation of Chicago's central role on the qualitative side of the methodological dichotomy. Fourth, it was a major plank in the construction and legitimation of the Mead-Blumer heritage of symbolic interaction [3].

These interrelated mythical constructs can be (at least partly) unravelled. What has happened, of course, is that particular constructions of the Chicago School have been developed to serve particular ends; be these affirmations of sociological traditions, legitimations of theoretical approaches, aids to unravelling the complexities of the history of sociology, or whatever. The myths passed from their particular (and not necessarily deliberate) genesis into the uncritical history and folklore of sociology.

We can, thus, uncover myths, such as those surrounding the 'Chicago School of Sociology'. But this uncovering or challenging of myths does not, in itself, reveal ideology. To provide evidence that engages a myth serves only to focus attention on taken-for-granted. Taken-for-granted are not synonymous with ideology. As a process of critique, myth exposure is but a first stage.

So where do we go from here? After all, the myths of the Chicago School, like all myths, have been challenged before, and will be again. However, they persist, albeit somewhat modified, or more ambiguous than they were before. The point is, myths will persist while they are challenged piecemeal.

They will wither only when the totality withers. When, in this case, the history of sociology is reconstituted. This, in turn, involves a reconstructed metascientific endeavour because the history of sociology is a resource to grasp the nature of the development of sociological knowledge. As such, it is about knowledge productive processes. The myths of the Chicago School persist because they are taken-for-granted. The historical record is rarely used, let alone engaged. More importantly, the history of knowledge production is confined to an analytic framework that traces the 'idea' through successive transformations (often via a 'master-disciple' lineage). It is, in other words, grounded in the cult of individual genius or charisma and disengaged from material reality. [4] In short, a materialist perspective is not applied to the myths of the Chicago School.

Until the history of sociology is viewed as the specific socio-historical processes of knowledge transformation, disingenuous constructions about sociological heritages, leading to the sorts of myths that are so easy to uncover for the Chicago School (or any other collective), will persist.

So, how does this help in addressing ideology? The point is that ideology is engaged as a result of critical research. It is not revealed. What is revealed is that there are ways of conceptualising the world that serve to blank off other conceptual frames. In addressing the nature of surface appearances these conceptual frames become clearer. One starts to see the frame. It is only when one works towards an alternative totalisation that the nature of the frames and their interrelationships, the whole ideological edifice, starts to emerge.

For Marx, money relations concealed the whole exploitative system embodied in the commodity form. This had enormous numbers of corollaries that enabled him to make sense of superstructural relationships. He could engage ideology once he grasped the totality. Similarly, (although on a smaller scale), the 'great ideas'/'great man' history of sociology obscures the knowledge transformative processes located in historically specific social settings. The internalist and/or transcendentalist accounts of knowledge production, which presume a lineage of knowledge, constitute an ideological frame that debar totalistic analysis of myths about the history of sociology. Removing the ideological screen, a process of deconstruction that depends upon the dialectical relationship of the part and the whole, enables a reconstruction of knowledge productive processes and a 'de-mythologised' assessment of the role of practitioners.

Let's try and develop this further in terms of the case study. What is the totality we are dealing with here? The totality is the study of the nature of the production of (scientific) knowledge. The history of sociology is a resource that is used in this endeavour. In dealing with myths about the 'Chicago School' one needs to address them via this framework in order to avoid piecemeal engagement.

What, briefly, is the nature of the prevailing framework? This is a complex issue and any characterisation is bound to be contentious. There is no room in this article to develop a full-scale analysis, the point at issue is the procedure for addressing myth, and the specific analysis of the Chicago School, is merely an example. The following characterisation of the 'totality' is, therefore, indicative rather than definitive. It refers to the 'dominant' tendency, and does not consider practitioners who have, in various ways and at varying levels, engaged this dominant approach [5].

The dominant approach to the history of sociology is 'presentist', i.e., the past is approached from the perspective of the present. It usually involves a construction of past events leading inexorably to a

particular view of the world as it is currently perceived. This means that any given perception of the current nature of the social milieu informs how the past is viewed. This is what Butterfield (1931) called the 'Whig' interpretation of history. This presentist approach is characterised, in the history of sociology, as a succession of 'great men' (Barnes, 1948; Odum, 1951; Martindale, 1960; Maus, 1962; Demerath & Peterson, 1967; Abrams, 1973; Coser, 1971) or 'great ideas' (Nisbet, 1966; Mitzman, 1970; Bierstadt, 1981) or a combination of the two, where a particular theme is traced through the work of a succession of practitioners, (for example, Bleicher's (1980) analysis of the development of hermeneutics and Madge's (1963) history of the scientising of sociology). An alternative presentist approach is to concentrate on academic units (Mullins, 1973; Tiryakian, 1979). However, these also tend to represent the succession of ideas approach in a different form, essentially they adopt a 'master-disciple' heritage tied to specific communicating units. In essence, they are all 'internalist' accounts and in that sense reflect the dominant tendency in both the philosophy and sociology of science (Popper, 1959, Kuhn, 1962, 1970; Lakatos, 1970, 1975; Holton, 1973; Barber, 1961; Barber and Hirschi, 1962; Barnes, 1972, 1974; Bloor, 1976; Mulkay, 1972). Indeed, most unit approaches explicitly adopt frameworks from the philosophy of science (notably Kuhnian paradigms or Lakatosian research programmes).

Internalist accounts are those that concentrate their attention on the development of knowledge within an academic/scientific realm and tend to disengage the production of knowledge from the wider academic milieu (Chalmers, 1978). In essence, then, the prevailing approach to the study of the development of (scientific) knowledge is to build an internalist account that shows a lineage of ideas progressing towards the perceived state of current knowledge. The problem with this is that current conceptualisations are not engaged and historical material is squeezed into an existing frame. When the approach is to concentrate on ideas rather than practices, this presentism is a relatively easy feat, it does, though, act both to distort the historical record and perpetuate the idealised framework of knowledge production. What is needed is an approach that engages the material practices of knowledge production. What, for the Chicago case study, are these?

Before attempting to provide an answer to this, a slight diversion on history is perhaps required. I have talked about the 'historical record' and 'distortions' of the 'historical record'. I do not intend this to be read in any historicist sense. I do not (in line with most current historical methodologists, e.g. Hobsbawm, 1981) think that there is a self evident and correct version of history. All historical material has meaning only in the way it is interpreted. So when I talk about engaging the historical record what I mean is that the material of history should be approached afresh, using primary data [6] as far as possible, via dialectically constructed theoretical conceptualisations. That is, a shuttling backwards and forwards between historical evidence and theoretical concepts to re-examine the structures that we impose on the historical situation. This can be further enhanced by similarly shuttling between historically situated meanings and currently reconstructed meanings of the data.

What does all this mean, then? Simply, that history is a resource for understanding knowledge production. History consists of 'evidence' and an 'interpretive framework'. What I am asking for is that, rather than the historical interpretive framework defining the nature of the evidence, that the evidence serve also to redefine the nature of the framework. That, for example, rather than develop an idealist construction of the history of sociology based on a presentist, internalist account of the succession of ideas, that we adopt an approach that engages the material practices of knowledge transformation.

So, for the 'Chicago School' case study, one needs to focus on the practices involved in constructing, legitimating and institutionalising knowledge. This involves a shuttling between the specific processes developed at Chicago, the wider academic milieu and the socio-historical setting. The specific methodological and epistemological frameworks that underpin those processes and their relationship to a wider social framework need to be explored. This process was, of course, a dynamic and changing process and the historical development needs to be taken into account along with changing interpretations both within the historical period under study and between current and past interpretations

Where do we start in the search for these knowledge transformative processes? We need to become 'immersed' in the historical milieu in order to discover the practices that were adopted at Chicago. This provides a start point. We look for clues. We do not impose a structure on this knowledge transformative process any more than Marx imposed a structure on his analysis of capitalism. His selection of the commodity form as a 'start point' was neither arbitrary nor a predefined base of analysis. Through considerable effort and engagement with capitalism as both a theoretical structure and a series of lived practices, Marx gradually developed the idea of the commodity form as intrinsic to an analysis of capitalism. Can this be mirrored in the analysis of Chicago sociology?

Immersion in the history of the 'School' indicated to me that a good point of departure would be the Society for Social Research at the University. This institution started in 1921 and lasted into the 1950s. [7] The society acted as a supportive association of sociologists affiliated, in one way or another, to Chicago. The aim of the society, as set out in its constitution, was to disseminate knowledge and act as a clearinghouse of ideas. The accessibility of the society, its summer institutes, communication network, frequent discussion meetings, and regular bulletin all served to advance this aim. The critical process at Chicago was, then, institutionalised in the Society for Social Research (Park, 1939; Bulmer, 1983).

Is the Society for Social Research, then, the 'fundamental unit' of analysis, like the commodity form? In essence it is. The commodity form was indicative of the underlying nature of productive relations. The knowledge transformative processes adopted in the Society for Social Research are indicative of the way in which knowledge was produced. How, in this case, sociology (social science) was made at Chicago. The making of sociology at Chicago could not go on irrespective of developments elsewhere. Sociology, as an academic practice went far beyond the boundaries of Chicago. An analysis of knowledge transformative processes at Chicago has, then, to be located within this wider framework. The examination of the practices adopted in the Society for Social Research is a fortunate choice in as much as it addressed itself to the national and, even, international development of sociology. The Society for Social Research had annual institutes and a nationwide network of contacts, as well as access to a national journal. The 'Chicago School' incorporated an open, and accessible, critical process that was integral to the work of practitioners both directly involved in work, of various sorts, at Chicago and of others in communication with those based at Chicago. The Chicagoans extensive involvement in American sociology made the 'Chicago School' one of the foci through which developments in sociological knowledge in the United States were directed. The Society for Social Research was integral to this development. The Society, then, acted to affect the development of the discipline nationally as well as responding to national changes in sociology.

Given the Society for Social Research as the start point, it is possible to explore the knowledge transformative processes in order to trace the development of sociology and the role and impact of Chicago. These processes are not simply 'internal' academic concerns but also involve the wider socio-

historical milieu. At one level, the situatedness of the Society reflects political and economic concerns as well as both wider social concerns and particular academic/educational ones. For example, at a broad level, the Society became established in the wake of the decline of the Progressive critique of the nineteenth century 'robber barons' and the associated reformist zeal. The early twenties were a time of the New Deal and political retrenchment with a flowering of a-religious and a-political sentiments. The new positivism was invoked to demand objectivity from social scientists, reflected in the call for more reliable and valid data collection and analytic techniques.

Essentially, then, the analysis of the Society for Social Research provides us with an indicator of the methodological and epistemological underpinnings of knowledge production. However, this critical research is not just concerned with the interconnections between the Chicago sociologists, sociology in the United States and the socio-political and economic structures. What is wanted, on the one hand, is an analysis of Chicago that investigates the knowledge productive processes; but on the other, following an analysis of these processes, the deconstruction of the prevailing framework, which prefers an idealist account of knowledge production and permits the representation of mythical accounts. The engagement with the myths of the school is thus more than piecemeal. It engages the framework that enables them. It is a totalistic critique. This does not mean, however, that we have necessarily dissolved all 'inhibiting frameworks'. A critical dialectical analysis certainly engages a prevailing frame/ideology. However, that does not, of itself, imply that the new perspective is ideology-free: that we no longer are encumbered by a frame. Marx, for example, was ambiguous about the extent to which engaging ideology dissolved all ideological encumbrances [8]. Some Marxists (such as Lukacs (1971)) argue that a 'conscious' working class will be ideologically free because ideology serves to legitimate and conceal reproductive relations of which there will be no need in a truly communist society. Althusser (1971) also suggests that critical 'scientific knowledge' will transcend ideology. I would not want to make a stand on the possibility of critical research transcending ideology. Critical social research currently operates in a situation where, as I argued earlier, knowledge is a social product; produced within a particular form of social relations. Engaging ideology is a continuous process, dissolving a frame is part of that continuing process.

In short, a critical approach to the case study, which engages ideology, would be one that investigates the processes by which knowledge is developed and evaluated within a 'school'. It would, thus, provide a basis for rational selection and interpretation of unit indicators, rather than relatively arbitrary decisions about groups of apparently related practitioners. It would also discourage reliance on secondary sources and thereby, perhaps, avoid the retelling and perpetuation of myths. More importantly, by revealing the frame of reference, critical engagement with metascientific presuppositions is possible rather than simply piecemeal examination of myths. In the last resort, the critical social researcher's digging beneath the surface must lead to a confrontation with prevailing core conceptualisations and not just with mythical constructs.

Thus, in conclusion, ideology is not critiqued *per se* but is addressed as part of a critical analysis of a substantive area. Ideology critique involves the demolition of a frame that serves to delimit analysis. The frame blanks off conceptualisations, permits, in effect, only an assessment of the protective belt. In order to confront myths one needs to find a route to the critique of the hard core. This substantive approach to the critique of prevailing frames of reference is what permits the critical social researcher to engage and critique ideology. It is, in the last resort, a critique that is materially grounded rather than one which attempts to engage ideology in general. An attempt to address ideology in general, like trying to define a

world-view, runs the very real risk of becoming an idealist discourse. That may be of value in itself but, I would argue, does not constitute critical social research.

NOTES

1. Details of the myths and misconceptions of the Chicago School utilised below can be found in Harvey (1985). Other useful sources are Bulmer (1984), Kurtz (1984) and Lewis and Smith (1981).

2. A complexity that I do not claim to have definitively unravelled.

3. This latter was also important in the establishment of the idea that Mead was a 'founding father' and major theorist of the early 'Chicago School': another myth. And so it goes on.

4. Most accounts of the 'Chicago School' in the literature are relatively brief and superficial, rather than detailed historical case studies. However, the 'Chicago School' has also been taken as a critical case by some sociologists of sociology concerned with developing systematic theories about the growth of sociological knowledge (Mullins, 1973; Tiryakian, 1979a, 1979b). Mullins' and Tiryakian's endeavours are laudable, for they adopt an approach that calls into question 'great man' and 'great ideas' approaches to the history of science and the production of knowledge and argue for a 'schools' or 'network' approach that looks at the institutionalising unit. However, their own particular analyses are not fully critical as they neither engage the historical evidence, nor sustain a theory of knowledge production, nor adequately explore the relationship between knowledge production and scientific milieu (Harvey, 1985; Truzzi, 1974). Their accounts reproduce the myths, thanks to a heavy reliance on one or two secondary sources. Their endeavours are dependent upon particular (internalist) thesis of knowledge production, viz. Kuhn, and they are more concerned to fit the evidence to a paradigmatic model than to critically engage the historical record.

5. Such people include Althusser (1969, 1971), Lecourt (1975), Feyerabend (1975a, 1975b), Radnitzky, (1973).

6. By primary data I mean existing records rather than secondary comments upon them. This may be archive material or, for recent events, recollections of those involved (such recollections must, however, be treated as though they have been modified by hindsight). Archive material varies enormously depending on the area and era of study. For the study of the Chicago School, I used material in the University of Chicago Regenstein Library Special Collections Department. This included correspondence, memoranda, drafts for articles both published and unpublished, course outlines, notes, commentaries, supervisors comments on theses in progress, minutes of meetings, applications for funding, and so on. In addition, the theses presented for examination by students, and the published material of the Chicagoans in the period under study also constituted primary data for the study. I also used 'second hand' primary data, viz., the verbatim recordings made by James Carey (1972) of his interviews with ex-Chicagoans, and Fred Matthews correspondence with Chicagoans for his book on Park (Matthews, 1977). This data was also lodged in the Regenstein Library. Secondary data used in the study included the large number of articles and books on the Chicagoans and related areas such as commentaries on G. H. Mead, the symbolic interactionists, etc., as well as general commentaries on the history of sociology. Introductions to the Chicago University Press, Heritage Series on the Chicagoans provided another source of secondary data.

7. The Department of Sociology and Anthropology inaugurated a Society for Social Research in 1921. It produced a Bulletin in 1926 and continued to do so two or three times a year until the 1950s. The circulation list included current and past Chicago graduates. Membership was open to all social researchers (graduates and staff), election to the society was fairly straightforward and new members were constantly being added. By 1926 there were around one hundred and fifty members. Subscription, payable annually, was a nominal \$1. Each year, from 1923, Summer Institutes were held, which lasted about three days and included a substantial proportion of invited visiting speakers, some of whom were members. The format of the regular weekly meetings changed over the years but, generally, they were addressed by graduates, staff, or outside speakers on matters of research practice, findings or philosophy. The society served to keep members informed of current research ideas and work in progress and also functioned as an informal network with contacts around the country. Hughes (1980) noted that while he was away in Canada he kept in constant touch with the University through the Society for Social Research. The society also performed one other major function, that of arranging discounts on textbooks and research monographs.

8. There are very strong grounds, for example, to argue that Marx's engagements with German idealism and positivistic economics certainly lead to a dissolving of various frames of reference and thus embodied ideological critique. However, he failed to engage a gender perspective and his work cannot, arguably, be regarded as ideology-free.

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